

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TEL AVIV 006641

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#). Mideast
- [2](#). Lebanese-Syrian Track

Key stories in the media:

Maariv, Yediot, and The Jerusalem Post, published the results of three polls that show improvement in the rating of PM Sharon's party Kadima (Forward). Were elections held today, Kadima would lead with 32-34 Knesset mandates; the Labor Party would get 26-28 Knesset seats; and Likud would get 12-13 mandates. Some media raise the possibility of a Kadima-Labor Party coalition after the elections. In the polls, Shinui is plummeting to 5-6 mandates. Ha'aretz and other media reported that the Likud has embarked on a drive to prevent key activists from following Sharon out of the party. The media reported that about 1,000 out of the 3,000 members of the Likud's Central Committee attended Thursday's committee session in Tel Aviv, the first since Sharon quit. The Likud primaries will be held on December 19. Israel Radio cited the Arabic-language newspaper Kul Al-Arab, as saying, quoting Sharon associates, that Sharon intends to include senior Israeli-Arab figures in his party, and to name a member of that community in the government he would form.

All media (banner in Yediot) cited a vaguely worded travel advisory made public by the GOI's anti-terror HQ, which warns that Israelis could be kidnapped all over the world. Yediot quoted an Israeli source as saying that Israel is concerned about a new Elchanan Tenenbaum affair. Some commentators said that Hizbullah is the group behind the threat. Yediot reported that Hizbullah planned to open a luxury restaurant in the Haifa area in partnership with an Israeli Arab it enlisted (he was arrested on November 7), in order to obtain information from senior Israeli security personnel and IDF officers regarding IDF offensive plans in Lebanon.

On Thursday, leading media reported that, following intense U.S. pressure, the UN Security Council on Wednesday issued an unprecedented condemnation of Hizbullah's attacks on northern Israel Monday. Israel Radio reported that this morning, Israel returned to Lebanon the bodies of three Hizbullah militants killed by IDF fire on Monday. The media reported that Israel made the decision on Thursday, following an official request by the Lebanese government. On Thursday, all media reported that an Israeli paraglider was blown down into Lebanese territory on Wednesday, sparking exchanges of gunfire between the IDF and Hizbullah until he managed to return safely to Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas will officially open the Rafah crossing today. The newspaper reported that no Israeli representative is expected to attend the ceremony. The Jerusalem Post also reported that on Wednesday night, Rafik al-Hasanat, a senior member of

Hamas who has been wanted by Israel for over a decade, returned to the Gaza Strip through the crossing, which was opened for a few hours on Wednesday to allow hundreds of Palestinians stranded on the Egyptian side to return to the Gaza Strip.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the U.S. Congress is working on a resolution that will ban Hamas from taking part in the election process and threatens relations between the PA and the U.S. should the PA fail to disarm Hamas. The newspaper wrote that House Resolution 575 was introduced last Friday by a group of Republican and Democratic congressmen and that it was referred to the House International Relations committee. The Jerusalem Post reported that a similar letter is now circulating in the U.S. Senate.

Leading media reported that Iyad Abu Rob, the commander of Islamic Jihad in Jenin, surrendered to IDF troops early Thursday morning, after a day-long siege. Abu Rob is suspected of involvement in the October 26 suicide bombing in Hadera that killed six Israelis. Ha'aretz reported that Zacharia Zubeidi, the head of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in the city, tried to mediate between the sides.

Ha'aretz reported that the High Court of Justice told Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz on Thursday to report within 10 days on preparations to demolish illegal structures at the Amona outpost near the West Bank settlements of Ofra.

On Thursday, The Jerusalem Post reported that the U.S. was willing to give Russian diplomacy another chance and that it would not insist on referring the Iranian nuclear issue to the UN Security Council in the meeting of the International Atomic Energy board of governors that was slated to take place Thursday.

Leading media reported that on Thursday, Jordan's King Abdullah II named Dr. Marouf al-Bakhit prime minister. Al-Bakhit was ambassador to Israel until a few weeks ago. Yediot notes that he speaks Hebrew.

The Jerusalem Post reported that a delegation of four Israeli Arabs headed by Knesset Member Talab El-Sana from the Arab Democratic Party left Thursday for Qatar to meet with Qatari leaders. The newspaper quoted El-Sana as saying he would meet with Qatari leader Sheik Hamad Bin Khalifa to discuss the situation of Israeli Arabs in Israel and the effects of the recent political developments on the peace process. The Jerusalem Post also reported that El-Sana told the newspaper: "We will also visit the offices of Al Jazeera-TV, which President George Bush wanted to bomb, and we will thank the emir for his support for projects in Palestine."

All media reported that India has expressed concern over the high crash rate of its Israeli-made spy drones, having taken up the issue with Israeli officials.

On Thursday and Friday, all media reported on controversy sparked by anti-Semitic comments that the American singer Michael Jackson allegedly made in a phone conversation with one of his former advisers two months ago. Israel Radio quoted media sources in Bahrain as saying that Jackson plans to convert to Islam or that that he has already done so.

Leading media reported that the Health Ministry announced on Thursday that a man who worked with migratory birds in the Hula Lake in northern Israel might have been infected with the dangerous genus of the avian influenza.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "Should there be no partner for Roadmap -- which is plausible -- Israel, on its own initiative, will leave expansive parts of Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank], [and] obtain (advance) American recognition of, (and silent European assent) to the new line."

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The American document par excellence ... mentioned things the Palestinians had never dared even ask for in the course of the negotiations."

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "If President Bush is interested in helping Sharon before the elections, he can follow two avenues."

Block Quotes:

I. "The Maps Are Ready"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (November 25): "Sharon is this week's big winner... More than anything else, Sharon's move was courageous and fit for a leader. In addition, it can be determined with certainty that Sharon wouldn't have gone for it had he not planned to take new bold diplomatic steps. There is no doubt about it -- had he wanted to spend his time playing around with the Roadmap, he would have stayed in the Likud. At this point, Sharon isn't talking about this and his advisers (Weisglass and Eival Giladi) have gone underground, but the maps have already been prepared. The formula that worked in Gaza will also be implemented in the West Bank. Should there be no partner for the Roadmap -- which is plausible -- Israel, on its own initiative, will leave expansive parts of Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank], concentrate behind the [separation] barrier in many areas, obtain (advance) American recognition of, (and silent European assent) to the new line, and stabilize a new situation in the region.... What could save Netanyahu would be (as usual) terror. This is also what could ruin [Amir] Peretz. On the other hand, there is no Shimon Peres on the other side ... but Sharon, who, let's remove any doubt, will always be able to launch a short Arab-munching operation in the middle of the [elections] campaign."

II. "What the Palestinians Never Dreamt of Getting"

Liberal op-ed writer Ofer Shelach opined in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (November 24): "The security negotiations [over a Gaza crossings agreement] went on for months without getting anywhere.... While -- according to Shimon Peres -- the lack of agreement over the crossing points meant we had not yet left Gaza, the ticking bomb of the living conditions of the Gazans -- which are entirely dependent on the passage of people and goods from Egypt to Gaza, continued to tick away loudly. In the end it was the danger presented by that bomb, which found expression in James Wolfensohn's threat to leave the region, which brought about Rice's intervention, and, with it, the American document par excellence that mentioned things the Palestinians had never dared even ask for in the course of the negotiations. In the final agreement Israel has no real control over who comes into or goes out of the Gaza Strip. This is not likely to endanger national security, as the establishment would like us to think, but it could have been prevented had the negotiations been properly conducted. But ... this agreement will not last, because this very same attitude will cause the security establishment to behave in ways that will undermine it.... The vicious cycle will remain unbroken: Israel's security fixations will damage its ability to achieve things by negotiation, then immediately afterwards the security establishment will prove that the negotiations were unnecessary from the outset. And so another prime minister will continue to back it up and the citizens of Israel will continue to believe it more than they believe anyone else, and nothing will ever change."

III. "Due Process"

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (November 25): "The fact that there is no pressing issue on the Middle East agenda -- and that any push forward in the peace process would have to wait in any case for the January Palestinian elections -- is helping the administration follow the upcoming Israeli elections from a distance. That is not to say that there is no interest in the dispute between Sharon and his former political home.... If President Bush is interested in helping Sharon before the elections, he can follow two avenues. The first would be to refrain from putting any pressure on Israel until the elections. Bush is not known for pressuring Israel in any situation, so it is safe to speculate that he will be able to take this route in the next few months as well. The second is by approving the special aid package of USD 1.2 billion for the development of the Negev and Galilee. The approval of this sum can go a long way in Israeli

politics and can be used by Sharon to show he voters how his good relations with the U.S. are essential for the future of Israel. Israel and the U.S. recently resumed discussions on this special aid package, but it is not clear if it can move forward before the elections even if Bush gives it the green light."

12. Lebanese-Syrian Track:

Summary:

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "[Hizbullah] clearly understood that a kidnapping operation would foment a broad Israeli response. This, in fact, was the aim: to divert attention from the results of the Hariri assassination investigation and ease the pressure on Syria."

Block Quotes:

"Hizbullah Rocks the Boat"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (November 25): "Since February, Hizbullah had refrained from firing Katyusha rockets into Israel and launching large-scale attacks on the Israel-Lebanon border. The situation in Lebanon and in Syria was not suited for such actions.... At the beginning of this week, a shift occurred in Hizbullah's operational approach. The organization launched a large-scale, well-planned operation that included the goal of kidnapping an Israeli soldier. Even though it was warned not to expand its operation by firing Katyusha rockets deep into the Galilee, the organization clearly understood that a kidnapping operation would foment a broad Israeli response. This, in fact, was the aim: to divert attention from the results of the Hariri assassination investigation and ease the pressure on Syria. It is equally clear that an operation like this would not have been launched without approval by Syria and Iran.... Hizbullah suffered an ... operational failure. It failed to achieve its goals, lost members, and left their bodies behind. The Security Council accused the organization of initiating the incident.... Not even the clearest photographs of Israeli army equipment that was damaged can blur the failure.... This is a complex state of affairs, which is liable to deteriorate into a broad confrontation between Israel and Syria. It is doubtful that Syrian President Bashar Assad can be relied upon to prevent such deterioration. Therefore, it is doubly important for Israel to keep its hands on the wheel, and take into account the need to avoid being dragged into the American-French confrontation with the Syrians and Hizbullah."

JONES